

Pornography on the World Wide Web

A Guide for Parents and Scout Leaders

The Internet is an integral part of our daily lives and it is a technology that the human society is building on. It is a vast universe that is filled with information, and people all over the world have taken advantage of this technology from creating personal web logs to banking systems with infrastructures built around it. Electronic commerce is estimated to grow into a US\$8-trillion industry by the year 2006.

Scouting is not an exempt to this proliferation. Hundreds upon hundred of Scouting websites has popped out trying to establish their presence online. The Merit Badge Research Center for the Boy Scouts of America by Michael Kauffman alone boasted more than 5-million visitors since it started counting on October 1, 1998. The figure shows the huge audience out there for Scouting. The World Organization of the Scout Movement has conducted online activities such as the Jamboree-On-the-Internet annually and the WonderForums by its Educational Methods Group in the early part of the year 2000s, attesting to Scouting's recognition of this growing media.

A Quick Introduction

I don't claim to be an expert when it comes to online pornography. I have seen my share of pornography online and in addition to those I've seen trying to put together ideas for this document. As far as I am concerned pornography can stay where it is and I am not bothered by grown men and women purchasing and supporting the medium.

This document focuses on the fact that minors can potentially be exposed to pornography. Minors can be as vulnerable and can also be as mature as any adult out there. It is the purpose of this document to provide a brief information about pornography on the Internet to provide you with an idea how you can combat it at home if you wish to.

It is quite beyond the scope of this document on whether pornography is evil or not. If you as a person can look at a pornographic media or multimedia and think nothing of it other than art, then good for you. But the truth is, there are people out there who will look at pornography and will see it more than just an art form.

State of Pornography on the Internet

Pornography—writings or images with the sole purpose of stimulating sexual desires—likewise proliferate on the Internet. Parents and Scout leaders must be aware and accept the fact that their children, on the Internet, has the ability to access whatever information is made available online, including pornography.

Online pornography is a 12-billion dollar industry. In a recent interview with adult magazine publishers, they have honestly disclosed that their businesses are experiencing negative growth in the last five years. Even multi-million dollar publishers such as Playboy experienced hardship in the sale of their popular adult magazines. But this didn't translate to people not wanting to see

pornography; it merely meant that consumers simply moved on to better things. Publishers admit that their customers merely shifted from magazine to the Internet, and that the Internet is a better alternative for consumers. Like magazines, the Internet can have words and pictures, but it can also have audio and video. It is also seemingly private compared to physically buying a magazine or having it delivered to your home.

Delivery Methods of Pornography

There are a number of ways to deliver pornography over the Internet, and as the years goes by, the delivery method becomes wider and better. Unlike magazines the Internet is multimedia. It can present information in text, images, sounds, and video. This makes the Internet a more lucrative venue for the sale and presentation of pornography.

Online Store Front

The traditional method of delivery is through online sale of pornographic magazines, VHS, and DVDs. This metaphors an actual store-front of an adult-entertainment oriented store without having the customer to physically drive and/or walk to the store. This provides the consumer a bit of privacy and encourages them to purchase videos or magazine that they would normally not purchase from a physical store.

Optimized Image Files

The most basic and straightforward manner of presentation of pornography online would be through photographs in digital formats. Most of the time, this is presented through what is now popularly known as a Thumbs Gallery Posting or TGP. Do note however that the presence of a TGP does not automatically denote the presence of pornography (much like a store front doesn't automatically mean they are selling pornography). TGP is simply a manner of presenting pictures online in the form of thumbnails, or bite-size versions of the original photograph or image. Once a mouse-click selects a thumbnail, the full blown image is presented. Commonly, images are presented in either JPEG (Joint Photographic Expert Group) or GIF (Graphics Interchange Format). It is also possible to present the image in other formats such as PNG (Portable Network Graphics).

Streaming and Non-Streaming Videos

Motion videos are also quite popular online. There are videos that you can download into your hard drive for offline viewing and there are those called *streaming videos* where they can only be viewed online. These videos are normally presented in WMV, RAM, or AVI formats that can be played on Windows Media Player or Real Player. Other format such as MOV is playable on Quick Time. Streaming videos are the same technology used on Philippine online news networks such as ABS-CBN and GMA for live video feeds and radio feeds.

Adult industry serves both downloadable and streaming videos to consumers. Streaming video is a media that is gaining popularity on the internet these days including live streaming videos

where you can chat live with entertainers called "models". These videos often include audio as well, where the model can talk directly to you.

Electronic Mail

E-mails are also used by the adult entertainment industry to deliver their products. Most of the time, they do their marketing through e-mails. This is done by simply registering your email through a website that offers a mailing list feature.

Instant Messaging

Instant messaging or IM such as those provided by Yahoo, MSN, and AOL, have become sophisticated forms of communication.

It is no longer limited to sending and receiving text messages instantly; IM now also features ways to send files, stream video, and stream audio.

The adult entertainment industry is taking advantage of this free form of communication to market their products and as their delivery method.

File Sharing

A more recent addition to the delivery of adult entertainment is through file-sharing, made infamous by Napster or through bit torrent technology.

Pornography Review

I have reviewed a couple of websites that offers pornography and have categorized what I think parents and Scout leaders should know about some of these pornographic websites.

Membership Fees May Apply

An adult entertainment website charges from as little as nothing to as much as US\$50.00 per month to gain access to the content that they offer. Access is normally unlimited. The fee (if any) is charged against your credit card, or through your US or European checking account. It is normally a monthly recurring fee until you decide to cancel your membership.

Pay-Per-View

Aside from membership fees, there are also those porn websites that charge *Pay-Per-View* fee. This is common with streaming videos and live one-on-one chat with actual entertainer or model. Fees that I have found online can be as little as US\$0.99 per minute to as much as US\$6.00 per minute. This is similar to phone-sex, except it is done online with video, audio, and text-chat.

Also in this category are videos that are available in DVD formats, but are streamed to your computer, similar to cable's pay-per-view.

Third Party Bill Collectors

Most adult entertainment websites don't collect the fees themselves. They outsource the collection to billing services online as it is quite expensive to maintain your own payment gateway. The most common of these billing services are PayCom and CCBill. PayPal is also used for this purpose, which is a payment provider often connected to eBay purchases. This is a plus for the consumer since it adds more privacy to the transaction as the merchant on the statement will be either PayCom or CCBill instead of the name of the pornography provider.

Big companies such as Playboy would employ their own payment gateways.

Free Previews

All of these adult entertainment websites offers a preview or tour of their content before you actually purchase the membership. The previews are more than enough to satisfy those who are curious but do not have the money to spend. This is sort of like test-driving a car before the purchase.

Our Concerns

Whether pornography can be considered as an art form or simply some perverted human act is a debatable thing and is beyond the topic of this document. It is not my concern if capable adults want to see pornography online; it is entirely their own business. Often the case, unsuspecting minors are drawn into such material whether it be online or not.

Pornography is Easily Searched Online

By simply typing sexually oriented words on the search box of your favorite search engine, you will instantly find thousands of websites that offers pornographic materials. Also, with the introduction of word-based image and video search on most search engines these days, you can easily get pornographic images and videos by typing sexually oriented words or a girl's name on the search box.

Protection on these search engines is not enough since the engine does not distinguish whether the user is a minor or not.

Pornography in your E-mails

Pornography by e-mail is done through solicited and unsolicited e-mail (spam). Solicited ones are done through a mailing-list style request box discuss in a previous section of this document. Spammers on the other hand employ sophisticated technologies to harvest e-mails from publicly available websites and message boards. Some members of the adult entertainment industry employ spam as a means of marketing their products to people and verify the existence of your e-mail through scripting-enabled images.

Instant Messaging Pornography

IM escapes us as an innocent, yet addicting, medium of online communication. With its recent advancement offering streaming videos and audio, IM such as those provided by Yahoo and AOL are being used for live pornographic shows. Their mode of operation on this one is to simply lure unsuspecting individuals into visiting their websites by first making it seem like a casual chat by dropping innocent lines such as "Anyone there?" If you don't respond, they will simply leave you a note to visit their website by saying, "look me up". If you do respond they will begin by giving their age, sex, and location (ASL) and immediately escalating the mood to open up IM-sex:

"cool. i was hangin out watching tv. i was getting kinda horny ☺
(*blushes). feel like a little cyber fun with me? please please..."

I've encountered at least five of these already and everything is scripted, including the (*blushes) and the "please please..." part. Eventually, they will abruptly end the entire escapade by saying that someone's calling and they have to take the call. Then they pitch it in, look me at my website.

Twice I even played around and said: cool... scripted and the response was scripted as well, what do you mean? whats a script? The word "script" was misspelled as "scriipt" on both occasions.

Simply put, this mode of operation will try and lure the intended victim to visit the website. If the victimized person became too excited about the short episode of sexual chat on IM, chances are that he will visit the site and will get lured to may be even paying the entrance fee into the members-only area. I have no clue how these people select their targets and if minors are hit by this method as well.

Because of the introduction of streaming videos and audio on IM, a person merely needs to attach a digital video cam and microphone onto his computer to transmit video and audio to another IM using person out there.

There are also people out there who will solicit for sexual encounters on IM, but of course for a price. Payments can be done through PayPal, an online payment provider that uses e-mails as its connection and your bank account and credit cards as a source of funds.

Entertainers that do live streaming chat videos often use this method to cut off middle-men of the live streaming video industry. Middle-men of course include the streaming video service providers. This works since doing IM is totally free.

There is no way for us to find out if these people are also targeting minors.

Pornography on Networking Websites

Networking websites such as Friendster and MySpace aren't safe from the proliferators of pornography. Websites such as these are popular among minors and young adults to stay connected with friends and start connecting with potentially new friends.

Although seemingly innocent, there are abusive people who create fake user profiles and are actively leaving messages to make friends with people. The object of course is to get you to become interested and get you to visit one of their website. With increased website traffic means an increase in potential customers.

Also, there is the danger that the abusive user does not intend to lead you to website, but intends to lead you out in real life and take advantage of the other person.

Free Access Pornography

Although most pornographic websites are enclosed inside protected areas accessible only to paying customers, there are still publicly accessible free previews or tours that these websites employ.

There are also free pornographic websites that does not put in the effort to verify the age of their viewers, and employ useless “enter” and “leave” links.

Excessive Marketing

Adult entertainment marketing tends to be over zealous and may employ the use of marketing agents that are unknowingly installed onto your computer. These agents are able to call pop-up windows, which a friend of mine called as “Pop-Up Hell”.

Corrupting Domains

One recent activity that is very unusual is the purchase of youth-related Internet domains and using it for adult entertainment. This was noted with the Boy Scouts of America’s (BSA) Merit Badge Research Center (MBRC) domain MeritBadge.org. MBRC wasn’t able to renew the domain registration on-time and it was purchased by a Hong Kong-based adult entertainment company.

This unfortunate event led to some Scouts and Scout leaders going into the porn site instead of the MBRC. Through an appeal however, the domain was directed to a general Internet directory that maintains a link to the porn site among other non-pornography links.

This incident has since been resolved and MBRC again holds ownership of the MeritBadge.org domain.

Again, these are highly unusual.

Developments to Minimize Youth Exposure

There have been a number of initiatives by different government and non-government organizations to minimize the exposure of young people to Internet pornography.

Right-of-Passage Gateways

Right-of-Passage Gateway is what I personally call the age verification process some pornography websites uses to confirm that a person is of the legal age to enter the website. This verification is done through the use of credit cards, without charging your credit card at all. Such verification methods are used by some of the free pornographic websites.

But we do note that there are freely available pornographic websites that does not employ such verification systems and pay-sites have publicly available free previews and tours without the need of age verification.

Kid-Friendly Search Engines

In recent years, several search engines have created Kid-friendly versions of their popular search engines. These search engines are as useful as their regular counterparts.

- Ask Jeeves for Kids [<http://www.ajkids.com>]
- Kids Click [<http://www.kidsclick.org>]
- Yahoooligans [<http://yahooligans.yahoo.com>]
- iThaki for Kids [<http://kids.ithaki.net>]

These search engines however does little to prevent young people from searching on non-kid-friendly engines.

Dot-Kids Domain

An initiative by the United States Government was the Dot-Kids domain. It was signed into law by President George Bush on December 4, 2002. It provides for a kids domain under the Dot-Us country domain.

To date, there is handful of Dot-Kid websites.

The Internet Content Rating Association (ICRA)

ICRA [<http://www.icra.org>] is an independent international organization that seeks to empower Internet users on what they want and do not want to see on their browsers. In effect, browsers that are set not to accept pornographic materials will not display pornographic websites that are rated by ICRA as such. Internet Explorer is equipped to use the ICRA system; you simply need to enable it.

The system however requires the cooperation of web authors to label their sites based on ICRA's system. Based on the rating you have set on your browser, only the website that falls under the rating you have set will be displayed.

Do note that not all web authors participates with ICRA, therefore they are not rated. A browser can be set to display or not to display an unrated website.

Dot XXX Top Level Domain

June 1, 2005, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) announced that it was in negotiation for a top level domain dot triple X (.XXX). This domain will serve as the “red-light district” of the internet. Scheduled to be finalized in September 2005, the approval of the domain was delayed due to the many opposition from those in the porn industry and those who are against pornography.

However, the creation of this domain does not stop producers of pornographic websites from using other top level domains such as the popular dot com.

Bringing the Ball Game to Our Home Court

Now that we have a basic awareness of how Internet pornography can be made accessible and inaccessible. Let us see some ways we can try to get an advantage. Remember however, that it is impossible eliminate the exposure of young people to pornography. All we can do is minimize it and control it.

Keep Your Computer Visible

Do not station your computer inside a room where a child can lock himself in and use the computer at his leisure. Place it in the middle of your living room or a place in your house where there is almost always someone passing by or doing their daily home activity. In this manner, you provide an environment that limits their total privacy as they use the computer. They will know that someone will always be able to see what they are doing and this will serve as a deterrent from having the computer used maliciously.

Entrust Your Kids with Responsibility

It is good to establish home-rules for your children whenever they use the computer particularly when they use it to surf the Internet. Rules can be as simple as making sure that they shut down the computer properly, turn-off the monitor, and turn off the main power switch on the surge protector. It can also include items such as not sharing personal information through chat or e-mail with someone the family does not knows personally and never arrange personal meetings with people they have encountered online, such as an Eye Ball (EB).

You should also make a child responsible to tell you, as a parent, whenever he encounters something that bothers him online or something unusual so that you may talk about it as a family. This opens communication lines between you and your child.

Home-Based Education

A factor that works against us in the Philippines is the fact that pornography is a tolerated taboo. What do I mean? It is the fact that we say it is dirty, we say it is immoral, but we Filipinos allow it to proliferate in our comic books, movies, and television. We see these things on huge billboards and we act as if it is not there.

This attitude makes it more dangerous. We deny ourselves the fact that young people are exposed to sexually suggestive and sometimes pornographic materials everyday, and we avoid the confrontation of talking about it because sex is generally a topic considered as taboo, when it is not. This lack of information about sex arouses curiosity among young people and without responsible and capable adults to guide them; they will explore it by themselves with the danger of being misguided.

It is a parental duty to educate your child about sex. It is a parent's duty to guide young people through their formative stages of life. By simply allowing the spark of curiosity without guidance, you have given them a very dangerous key to explore some uncharted jungle in life. The sad thing about this is that kids don't need you to spark that interest in them, TV and all other mediums does the job for you and leaves you to educate them.

Learning about sex and about the opposite sex is part of education. It is good and should never be considered as taboo. Although it is easier said than done, Parents should never be afraid to discuss this with their children. It is also important for us to realize not to allow our children to do the learning by themselves—they need your guidance. Again, the danger comes when they are curious and tries to learn without your guidance. This usually ends up with them being addicted to sexually suggestive themes and self-sexual abuse.

It is important to remember that we are to educate them in a timely manner. In my opinion there is no minimum age of when they can be educated about it (well that is my opinion; I am no expert mind you). As soon as kids ask about these things, we should educate them little-by-little in a manner they can relate to. Do not scold him off by confronting them with words such as *"where did you learn that!?!"* or *"who taught you that!?!"*, for in the future he will look back to this and will be fearful to ask again. We must educate them as soon as curiosity sparks, but we must be aware of the level of their understanding. So to me, there is no such thing as too young. Remember, the birds and the bees.

We should also avoid the mind-set that school will take care of this for us. Do remember that not all schools offer sex education, and, if they do offer it, teachers will not go into a more personal approach of the matter. Sex education in school is more of an off-shoot of Biology and more often than not, never really addresses the individual needs of each child. Parents are in the forefront of this and can more effective in educating their own children.

When I was in school, sex education was never part of the school's curriculum. There was only a concerned home economics teacher who took a moment of her cooking-class time to teach us about the realities of sex and the science behind it. Such a thing would have gotten her in trouble with our school's administration. I thank her for that.

Supplemental Tools for the Game

Some of the suggestions I have in this section definitely constitutes an invasion of your children's privacy. I still say that the best solution whenever you suspect your kid viewing pornography is to confront them and ask them nicely.

Parental Control Software

Parental control software have surfaced through the years that assists parents in screening websites, chat-sites, and other computer elements they deem inappropriate for their children. There are commercially available software such as NetNanny, CyberPatrol, and SolidOak that normally costs around US\$40.00 a copy. But quite honestly, most of us won't be able to afford such an expensive piece of software. It is recommended that you stay with ICRA's system if you wish to filter out these web-based elements and simply uninstall all the local elements that you do not want your child to access.

Auditing Your Computer

It is a good idea to audit your computer for the presence of pornographic materials. First you can check out your browser history for any URL closely resembling a pornographic website.

You may want to check the "Temporary Internet Folder" found under the Windows sub-directory or under the Documents and Settings sub-directory, depending on your version of Windows.

You may also want to check programs that are currently installed on your computer by going to the "Add Remove Program" option found under the Windows control panel.

Lastly, using the "Search" option found under the "Start" menu, you can try to find image files with JPG and GIF extensions or media files with WMV, RAM, RM, or AVI formats. Since these are all standard formats, these aren't always storing pornographic materials.

Note however that the search option will exclude folders marked as private on any Windows NT, 2000, or XP using the NTFS file system.

Pop-Up Blockers

There are commercially available pop-up blockers to stop the crazy pop-up hell. With the release of Windows XP SP2 update, Internet Explorer is now equip with Microsoft's own pop-up blocking mechanism. I recommend people to see if Microsoft's free pop-up blocker fits their needs before going out an buying commercially available ones.

Spyware Detection and Firewalls

I recommend that people get either the latest McAfee or Norton Anti-Virus software. The latest release includes spyware detection mechanism that scans through your system as it scans for viruses and deletes these malicious installs. McAfee so far worked so nicely for me.

Also, by downloading the Yahoo toolbar, you can also get their Anti-Spyware program. Microsoft has also released a beta version of their AntiSpyware program.

Now, especially for those who have high-speed Internet connection that is always on, it is never enough to just have Anti-Virus software. Microsoft Windows XP SP2 update included major

update to their embedded network firewall where you can select particular programs that are allowed to initiate Internet requests. Personally, I have Windows' firewall activated and have a hardware firewall connected between my DSL modem and router, and my router employs its own firewall (that gives me a false sense of security). You can never be too safe.